

10 Tips to Creating a Post-COVID Onsite Event Experience

by RICK QUINN, Director of Client Engagement, TPNI

Overview

Face To Face Events Will Be Back!

People *want* to go to events. They go to see and feel a product. They go to be educated, to network and socialize. And as of May, 2020, it's already happening. China just had a 62,000 Auto Show. South Korea just had a 45,000 Architecture show. Both events had limitations – things that we are currently doing today, including masks, face shields, sanitation stations, medical presence, etc.

People May Be Scared To Attend

People are skeptical about travelling, being around other people and going to conferences. We need to do everything we can to ease their concerns and make them feel safe.

Tip 1 – It Starts with Pre-Show Registration

Ensure Your Site Is Responsive

More and more people are registering using a mobile device. Ensure that your registration pages will respond differently on a mobile device than on a laptop or tablet.

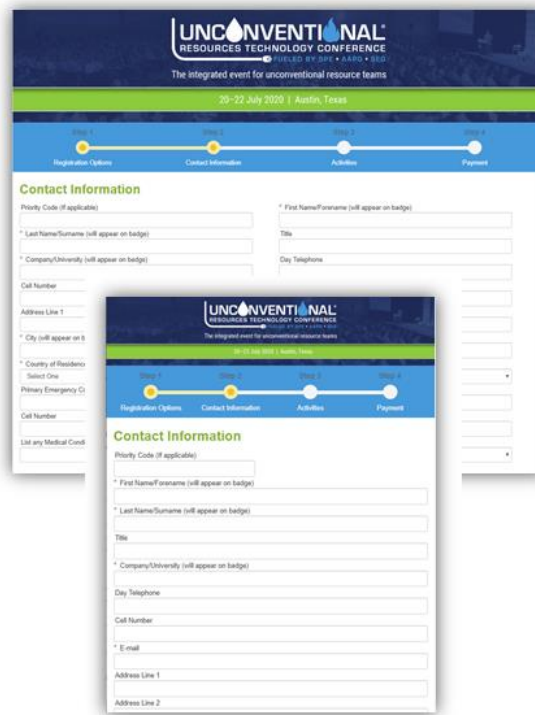
Minimize What Data Is Being Collected

Don't ask for information you are not planning on using. Before you put these fields on your registration pages, ask yourself how you are going to use the data. If you are not sure you will use it, leave it off (at least on the mobile forms).

Use Past Data and Send Links Whenever Possible

When you start marketing your event, send out personalized URL's when possible. You have the data. Make it easy for your audience to register by pre-populating as much of the data as you can.

You know your audience. You know who registered. It will be easy to create additional emails to the same list, filtering out those that have already registered.



Tip 2 – Your Mobile App Is the Key

Make the App Available As Soon As Possible

A friend of mine used to always say, “Don’t let perfect get in the way of better.” A key piece of the onsite attendee experience is to increase your mobile adoption. Push this early and often.

It’s Ok for You To Launch Before All the Data Is In Place

Your attendees understand that exhibitors are signing up all the way through the event. They get that speakers come and go and that rooms can change. You may choose to not display your agenda until you get closer to the event. You may not display exhibitor information until then as well. That is fine! There are plenty of other helpful pieces of your mobile app to keep them coming back– maps, venue information, show hours, etc.

Use the App for Reminders Alongside Emails

One of the more under-utilized functions of mobile apps is the built-in notifications. Use this as a communication tool not only onsite, but pre-show as well. Use this alongside your email tool, to send out event highlights, new sponsors, speaker spotlights and more. Even use it to upsell your exhibit hall registrations to a conference pass.



Tip 3 – Prepare Signage

Make It Easy To Get the App and Register Onsite with QR Codes

Proper signage is key to help attendees (and exhibitors / speakers / etc.) navigate your event. Place signs featuring QR Codes frequently so your attendees can register onsite using a mobile device. The signs can be placed anywhere – airports, headquarter and satellite hotels, bus stops and various places within the convention center.



Tip 4 – Eliminate Onsite Registration!

Make Registration Available Via the Mobile App / Smart Phone Only

This one pains me the most, but thinking this through, eliminating onsite registration makes a lot of sense. We have already optimized your registration pages for mobile devices. You have placed your QR Codes with a link to registration in the hotels and throughout the convention center. Mobile browsers have the same functionality as desktop browsers. They remember form data and auto-fill settings, and one can easily use the saved credit card.

Less to Sanitize / Less for Attendees to Touch

Onsite registration has way too many physical touch points. People touch computers, counters. All of this would need to be sanitized and cleaned after each and every attendee. The registration laptops, the registration counters. All of it needs to be cleaned.



Will Still Need *Some* Onsite Counters – Payments and Upgrades

For the folks that want the hand holding. They have a balance due and can't use the app for whatever reason. They have general questions that need to be answered. This will not go away but it can be done with a minimal footprint.

Tip 5 – Eliminate Stanchions!

Nothing to Sanitize / Nothing for Attendees to Touch

Even when you remove the onsite registration, there will still be some counters for onsite help and general information and questions. Physical stanchions lead to people touching them. If they are gone, there is nothing to clean and sanitize.



Use Tape on the Floor

People follow markings on the floor. Go to any grocery or home improvement store. There are tape marks that tell us which way to go, which aisles we can go down and where we queue up before we check out.

Use Floor Stickers and Get Them Sponsored

Floor stickers have the same affect. They tell us where to stand so we don't violate social distancing rules. And these stickers can be also be sponsored to generate additional revenue.

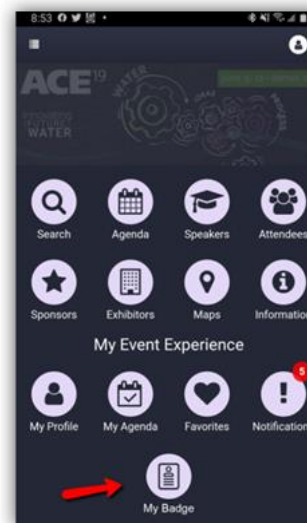
Tip 6 – Eliminate Badges!

Offer “Print At Home” or via Mobile App Only

Create a virtual badge in your mobile application or use a “print at home” approach, and make sure you explain the options to your attendees and let them decide what they want to do.

For virtual badges – people are doing this already. Major airlines have an app. The app has your boarding pass. The boarding pass is only available within 24 hours of your flight. Going to sporting events – these have gone to hybrid ticketing as well. They are on your app or sent via email. You can print the ticket or save to your phone. The tradeshow industry is no different.

For those registrants that want a physical badge, offer them a print at home solution. As part of the email confirmation, include a section that was the registrants' badge including instructions on where to cut and how to fold. It worked well.



Can Still Display Same Information – Credentials / Name / Logo

For virtual or print-at-home badges – you will not lose any of the information on traditional badges. They can still have your show logo with dates, contact information, there will be a barcode for scanning as well as any credentials needed to access sessions / receptions or the trade show floor.

For Mobile – Only Activated Once Onsite

For the mobile app – the “My Badge” can be configured to only appear during the show days. Once the badge is clicked and activated, this information is now available to show organizers for reporting purposes.

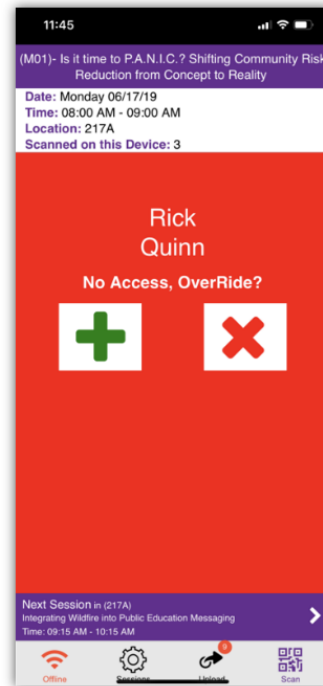
Tip 7 – Session Scanning by Smart Device

Use Devices That Can Scan Virtual Badges

Since we are going with a hybrid badge approach, if you are looking for session rosters or to validate credentials at the door, your scanners must be able to read a smart phone. Typical phones / ipods / ipads will not scan a phone out of the box. The good news is that there is additional hardware you can use with your device to read smart-phones. They can slide over your device or you can have an external reader to read the badges.

Still Have Same Options – Tracking Attendance / Access Control. Option Available On Mobile App to “Check-In” And “Check-Out” of Sessions

For CEU purposes, another option – rather than having someone scan their badge, is to allow your attendees to check themselves into the session they are in. The way this can work is to coordinate with the speaker – give them a code and at the beginning of the session the speaker will make a quick announcement letting the audience know they can now check in to the particular session. For tighter controls, you can validate the check-in process by having the attendees enter in the code the speaker will provide.



Session QR Codes

This is another way of having attendees check themselves in without having to scan their badge at the door. At the end of the presentation, have the speaker display a session-specific QR Code. The attendees scan the QR code, type in their badge number and the information is stored!

Real-Time Reporting

Since this is all done on mobile or smart devices, the information gathered is available real-time! The management team has immediate access to reporting and your attendees can start the CEU process immediately.

Tip 8 – Lead Retrieval by Smart Device

No More Fishbowl! Business Cards Will No Longer Be Used

We have been saying this throughout these tips. Eliminate as much touching as possible. This also means that business cards are no longer as useful as they used to be. Eliminate the fishbowl! Since business cards are not useful, lead retrieval becomes more critical to proving a positive ROI for your exhibitors.



Exhibitor Mobile App To Scan Virtual Badge / Self-Print Badge

Lead retrieval should be limited to just a mobile application. No more renting scanners. No more getting print-outs. Everything is done through the exhibitor mobile lead retrieval application.

If Badges Are Virtual, Exhibitors Will Not Disqualify On Attendee Type Alone

If badges are virtual, exhibitors will not disqualify future prospects on attendee type alone. Think about this. Many, if not all, registrants will not have a badge on them as they walk around the show floor. How many times have we seen exhibitors in their booth, look at the badge types as folks walk by and not strike up a conversation because of their attendee type? It happens all the time. Exhibitors want to deal with the low hanging fruit. What they may not know is that the person who just walked by them, while they don't have a great attendee type on their badge, is a decision maker, a future buyer or has the perfect contact that is one. By not having physical badges it will force your exhibitors to talk to everyone!!

Make It 2-Way

While traditional lead retrieval is great, having a 2-way approach is even better. Give your attendees the tools they need to get information from exhibitors if the exhibitor is busy talking with other prospects. We know they are, because they need to talk to everyone.

Attendee Can Walk By a Booth and Opt-In

With the push of a button on the attendees' mobile app, the attendee can opt-in and become a lead for that exhibitor without any face to face contact. The exhibitor gets the lead and the same contact information from the attendee as they would have if the badge was physically scanned.



Tip 9 – Session Q&A with the Mobile App

Remove the Mic for Q&A

Eliminating as much touching as possible includes floor mics in the session that are used for questions and answers. We aren't saying get rid of Q&A altogether, rather have a chat feature built into your mobile application.

Have Questions Be Part of the App the Moderator / Speaker Has Access To

If the attendee has a question, they can go to their app, click on the session and send their question to the speaker or moderator. The speaker / moderator will be able to see all of the questions and answer them directly during the q&a period. You may also want the ability for all attendees to see all the questions from others. This may help attendees not ask the same question over and over.



Continue To Foster the Attendee -> Speaker Communications After the Session Is Over

This methodology also extends the life of the session by allowing attendees to communicate with speakers after the session is over. How many times have we seen attendees not being able to ask the question they want because of time constraints? This solves that!

Tip 10 – Networking with the Mobile App

Lead Retrieval for Attendees

People go to conferences for networking opportunities. They want to see and talk with other attendees. They may want to strike up deals. Why limit lead retrieval options to just exhibitors? Your mobile application should allow for attendees to become a lead for other attendees. Again – there are no business cards so how else are we going to share our contact information with each other? It can be done in the mobile app.

Opt-In To Get More Information

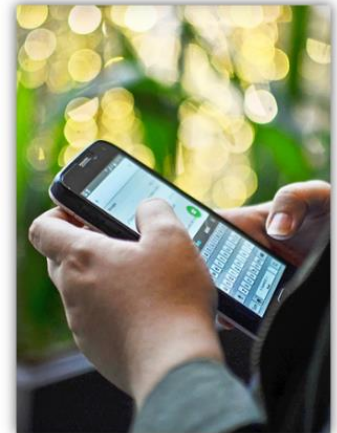
Allow your attendees to opt-in to other attendees through the mobile app. This will send over the same contact information that is found in a business card but in an electronic format and without touching!

Social Profiles / Messaging

Have your attendees create a show profile. Include their social links – LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, company and personal Facebook pages. It all matters.

Contained Within / Outside Of Mobile Application

Communication and messaging – if your audience does not want to share their personal contact details with someone else, your mobile app should be used as a hub for attendee to attendee communication. Use the app to send and receive messages without relying on external tools like email.



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